

### III. Corridor Assessment

## HOUSING

During phase II of the planning process, it became evident that in order to stimulate investment within the corridor, the conditions of the surrounding neighborhoods needed to be considered. Specifically for the surrounding neighborhoods in the Ward 1 portion of the corridor, issues relating to the residential building conditions and the Park Morton apartment complex, need to be addressed.

The following details the two key housing issues:

#### Housing Rehabilitation and Vacant & Abandoned Properties

While there are some signs that property owners and private investors are rehabilitating residential properties throughout the Ward 1 portion of the study area, there is still a visible significant number of dilapidated housing in need of rehabilitation. The Plan's market analysis indicates that the market area's housing stock is aging with minimal construction since the 1960's. Fifty-eight percent of the existing units were built prior to 1939 and only 2.2 percent or 164 units were built since 1980. Property owners who are not able to maintain their properties, due to either negligence or elderly homeowners and others with limited means for property maintenance, has further put stress on this aging housing stock.

The Ward 1 portion of the study area also contains many vacant and abandoned residential properties. Clusters of these properties are located on the west side of Georgia Avenue.

These vacant and abandoned properties also present serious fire safety concerns for the community. These structures are highly vulnerable to accidental fires because of faulty wiring and flammable debris and can also be susceptible to homeless individuals who start fires inside the property to keep warm. These vacant and abandoned properties are also frequently targets for arson.

As a whole, vacant and abandoned properties contribute to blight, crime, and neighborhood instability. Property abandonment negatively impacts property values within the community, provides lower tax revenues for the city, causes higher municipal costs and greater negative externalities.

#### Park Morton Apartment Complex

The Park Morton apartment development is a public housing complex located in the Park View neighborhood (Ward 1) of the study area. The property was built in 1960 and is made up of 17 garden-style apartment buildings with 174 walk-up units, all of which are two-bedroom units. The majority of the households are headed by females with two to four children. All of the units at Park Morton are under the Low Income Public Housing inventory, which does not include any Housing Choice Voucher Program recipients.

Apartment residents and surrounding neighborhood residents have expressed concerns about the amount of crime and drug activity on and surrounding the Park Morton apartment complex. Many have viewed this situation as a contributing factor to attracting and fostering negative activity in the surrounding neighborhood, as well as an obstacle to any serious investment in and around the corridor.

The District's Housing Authority (DCHA) who owns and manages the apartment complex, has worked extensively to reduce crime at the Park Morton Complex. Just as recently as 5 to 10 years, the development was plagued with crime but over the years crime has been significantly reduced. This has primarily been through lease enforcement

("One Strike" policy) and coordinated public safety efforts between the DCHA and Metropolitan Police departments.

The following improvements/actions have been implemented:

- Installation of cameras and bullet-proof lighting
- Installation of barriers in alleyways behind Park Road and Morton Street
- Weed and Seed mobile unit
- Removal of ladders leading to building roofs and locking of access hatches to roofs
- Construction of a new playground
- Upgrade of fire alarms
- Interior and exterior painting
- Repairing/replacing of exterior doors and door locks
- Landscape improvements

Although it is evident that DCHA has made improvements to Park Morton in terms of safety and physical upgrades, the development is still challenged with a poor physical layout and design, which consists of suburban style apartment buildings that are not in character with the existing row house neighborhood and creates a visible exclusion from the surrounding community. As such, Park Morton incorporates design elements that have the tendency to foster criminal activity, such as odd street patterns that dead end in the middle of a development and central spaces that are invisible from the street and are absent defensible

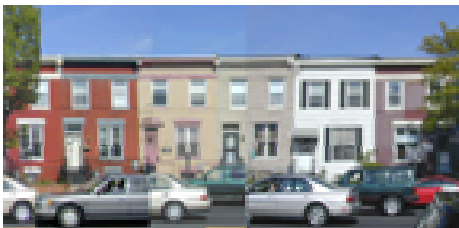


FIG. 19.1 - Georgia Avenue Rowhouses

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and well-defined private space.

Many residents of Park Morton are in need of social services to improve their quality of life. The issues include:

- Unemployment and underemployment; job training
- Drug rehabilitation
- Lack of proper supervision for youth
- Lack of appropriate activities for youth in the community
- Improved parenting skills
- The property is frequented by non-residents who abuse and sell illegal substances

It will be critical to explore opportunities to address both the physical and social revitalization of the Park Morton public housing complex not only to improve the apartment development and the living condition of those who live there but also to create an asset to build upon for future investment in the neighborhood as a whole.